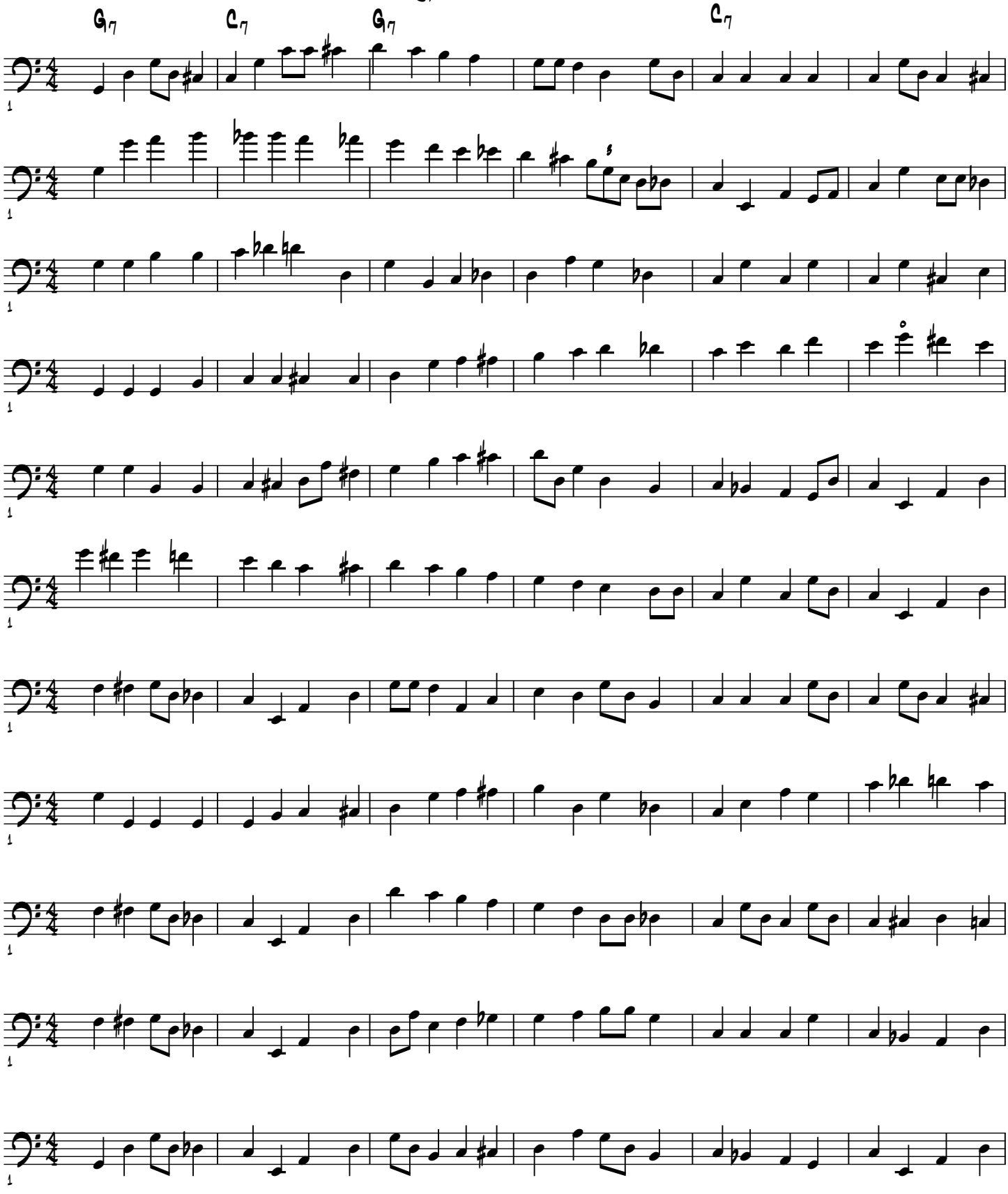
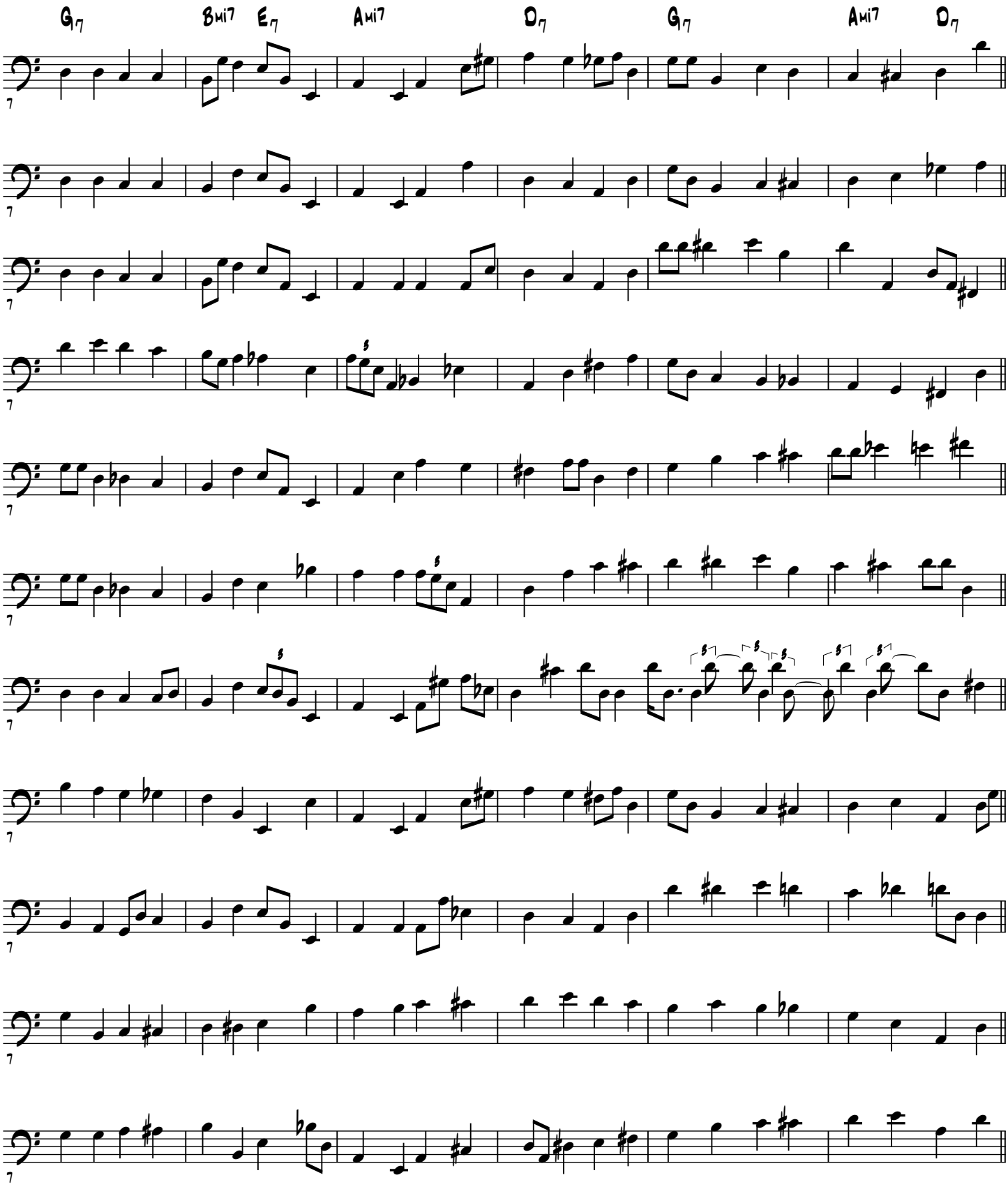
Bass Lines from Frankie & Johnny

Bass line by Ray Brown

As recorded on Milt Jackson's "That's the Way it is" (1)

Transcribed by Zachary Matthews




G7
Bmi7
E7
Ami7
D7
G7
Ami7
D7

Tom Warrington's
"Crawl Before You Walk"
article from
Jazz Educator's Journal (Sept. 1998)
and
jazz bass lines
(transcribed by Brent Jensen)

You Walk

changes basic and in a consistent harmonic rhythm. Then get the drummer and bassist to work together again on this form as they did on the blues.

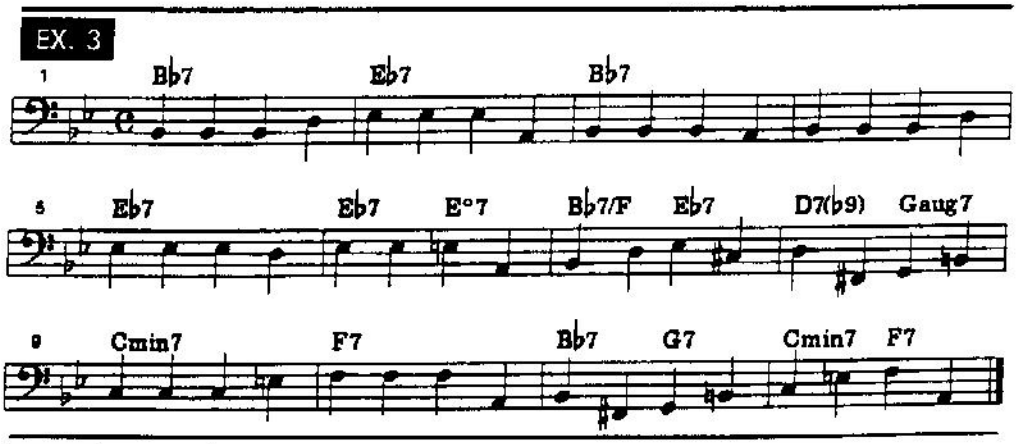
Beyond Roots

Once their rhythmic alignment is achieved (no small feat!), the rhythmic foundation is in place; and the other two elements of a quality bass line can be examined and added: harmonic/structural foundation and counter-melody. Once bassists learn notes' locations on the instrument well enough to find the chord roots without difficulty, they should expand their arsenal with some chord tones and passing tones.

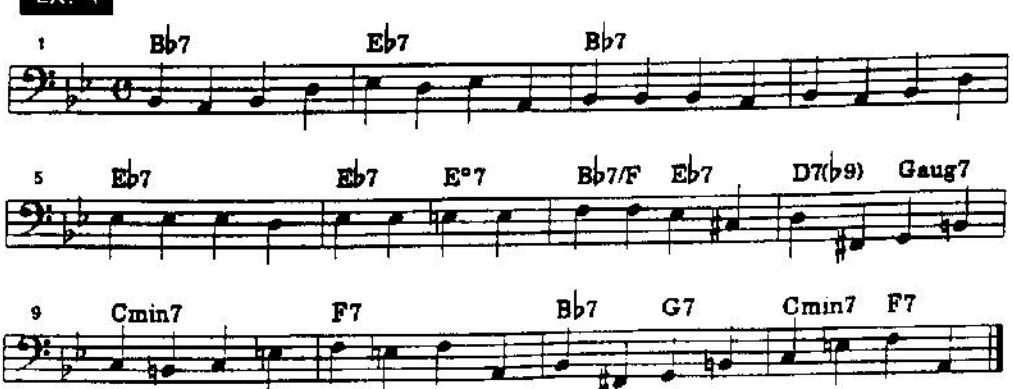
This can be accomplished without the encumbrance of massive theoretical study. For example, have the player add one simple passing tone —a leading tone—to the repeated chord-root technique: every time the chord changes, the bass plays a leading tone (a half-step below the next chord root) on the beat just before the chord changes (Ex. 3). Remember the primary focus: not so much playing the "right notes" but rather notes at the *right time*, aligned with the ride-cymbal beat.

Once the beginning bassist is comfortable with these primary techniques of chord chart-reading and generating a good time feel with the drummer, there are several ways of embellishing the basic concept. For example, where one chord exists for at least four beats, a lower neighboring tone might be included in the line along with the leading tone. Thus rather than playing three chord roots (on beats one through three) and then the leading tone (on beat four), the lower neighboring tone could sometimes be inserted on beat two (Ex. 4).

EX. 3



EX. 4

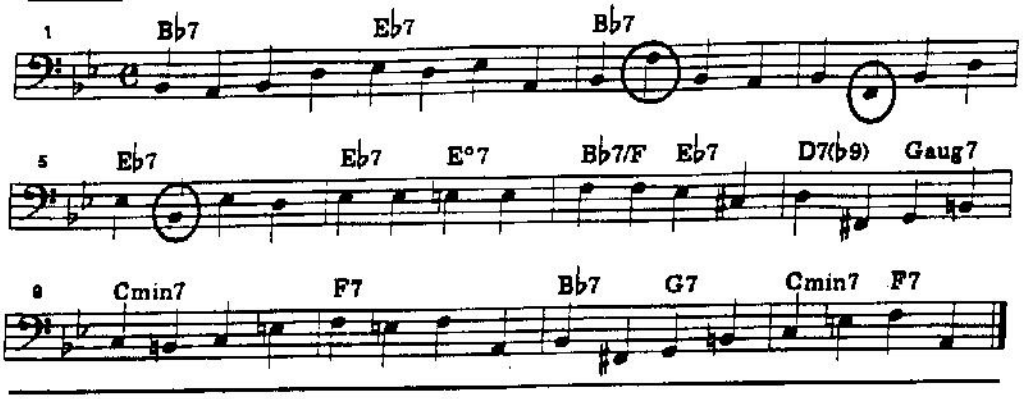


Another alternative to playing three chor roots in a row is to insert the fifth (Ex. 5), whic introduces the idea of chord outlining. You ca show a student how to find the fifth of any chor root as a pattern-shape on the bass fingerboar —without delving into *any* theoretical discus sion. The fifth is found on the adjacent lowe string, directly across from the chord root—o on the adjacent higher string, two frets above (Ex. 6).

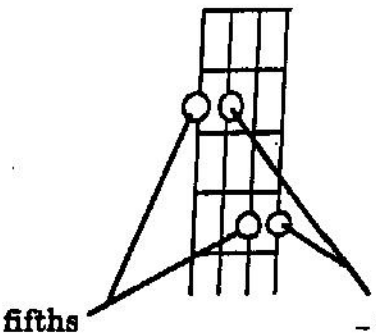
Continuing to build on this pattern-basis, the student could occasionally shift up or down an octave to play another root (Ex. 7); or add an extra leading tone, creating *two* half-step approaches (Ex. 8); use occasional approaches from a half-step *above* the next chord root (Ex. 9); or even insert a fifth between a high and low chord-root, creating a basic "drop" concept (Ex. 10).

These multiple possibilities allow a young bassist to continue to concentrate on generating a strong time feel while creating some very interesting bass lines—without too much reading or theory getting in the way. As the player gets stronger and more comfortable with this process, the ability to sustain a continuum of concentration will increase. This skill—maintaining a level of intensity over an extended time

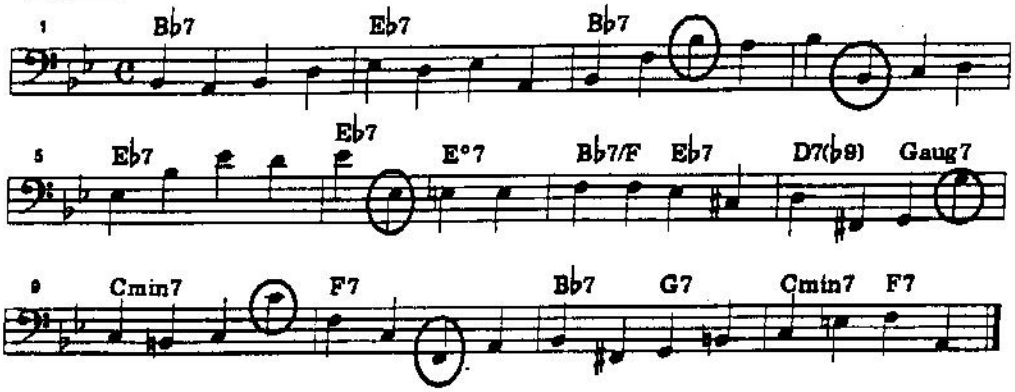
EX. 5



EX. 6

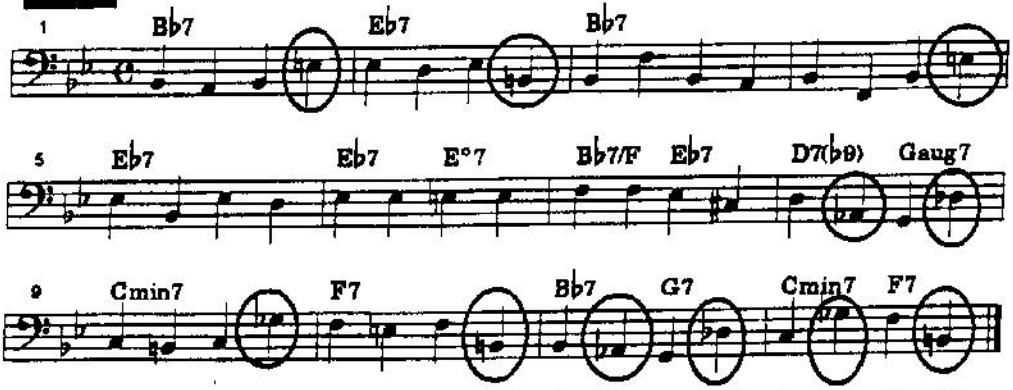


EX. 7

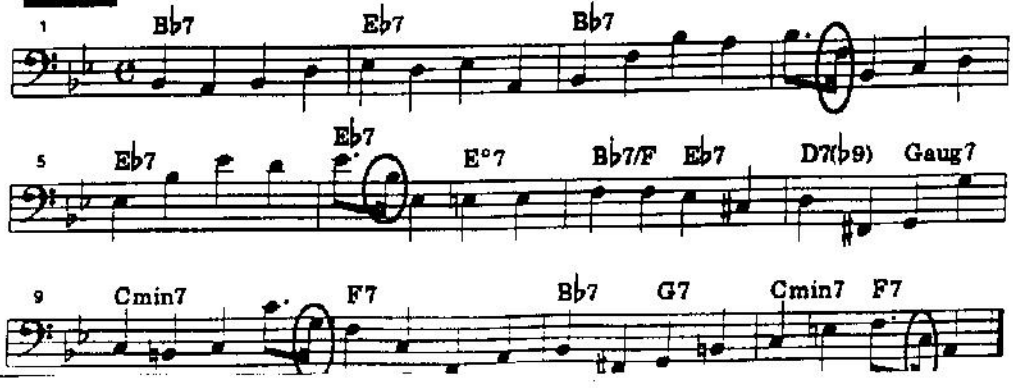


EX. 8

EX. 9



EX. 10



period—is so important in order for a rhythm section to bring a piece of music to life; and it will begin to evolve naturally as players listen and really tune in to each other.

Getting Set

Other basic points should help to unify the rhythm section. Though it would seem obvious that the section members should be set up in *close proximity* to one other so that they can hear and function as a unit, I still see ensembles with the drummer up on a riser and the pianist and bassist down in front some twenty to thirty feet away. It is impossible to play together when you are that far apart.

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The bass *sound* is also very important. Try to get a balanced sound from the bass (acoustic or electric) that emulates the sound of an unamplified acoustic bass. Pay attention to amp settings, keep the volume audible but low, and set the tone controls so the "meat" of the sound in the lower-middle range is present without ultra-low boom or high-end twang. The bassist's technique can also assist the sound. Make sure that the left hand is holding down the notes for their full value, connecting one note smoothly to the next without gaps. An electric bassist's right hand can also pluck the strings more toward the end of the fingerboard: this better imitates the acoustic-bass attack.

Resources

There are literally tons of material for further study. I grew up in the '60s, listening to the Beatles and rhythm-and-blues groups. The Beatles' tunes had logical harmonic structures, and the bass lines functioned well without being overly complex. Later I studied Bill Evans for the sheer beauty of the harmonic flow, and this pursuit is always a fruitful one for aspiring bassists. In the big band realm, the early Thad Jones & Mel Lewis recordings include masterful bass lines composed by Thad that are worthy of study. There are also lots of good texts out there, including Rufus Reid's *The Evolving Bassist*, the materials included in my author's statement below, and those referenced in Steve's Houghton's article later in this same issue of the *JEJ*. But the most important assignments for the beginning bassist are to *listen* to lots and lots of the music you are trying to emulate, play as much with other players as you possibly can, and have some fun while you're at it!

Tom Warrington is currently one of the busiest bass players in Los Angeles, having moved there from New York City seventeen years ago. He has toured and recorded with a long list of great artists, including Freddie Hubbard, Buddy Rich, Denny Zeitlin, Randy Brecker, Bob Florence, Billy Childs, Mose Allison, Terry Trotter, and Joe LaBarbera; and his playing is featured in Jodie Foster's film, "Little Man Tate." Tom's active schedule of studio recording recently included a GTE commercial with Herbie Hancock: he performs concerts, offers clinics, and tours with many different jazz groups. Highly regarded as a clinician and educator, he has also published a variety of musical works (having received a Master of Music degree in Composition from the University of Illinois) and instructional materials (including ***The Contemporary Rhythm Section*** *text and video series and* ***Essential Styles*** *play-along series.*

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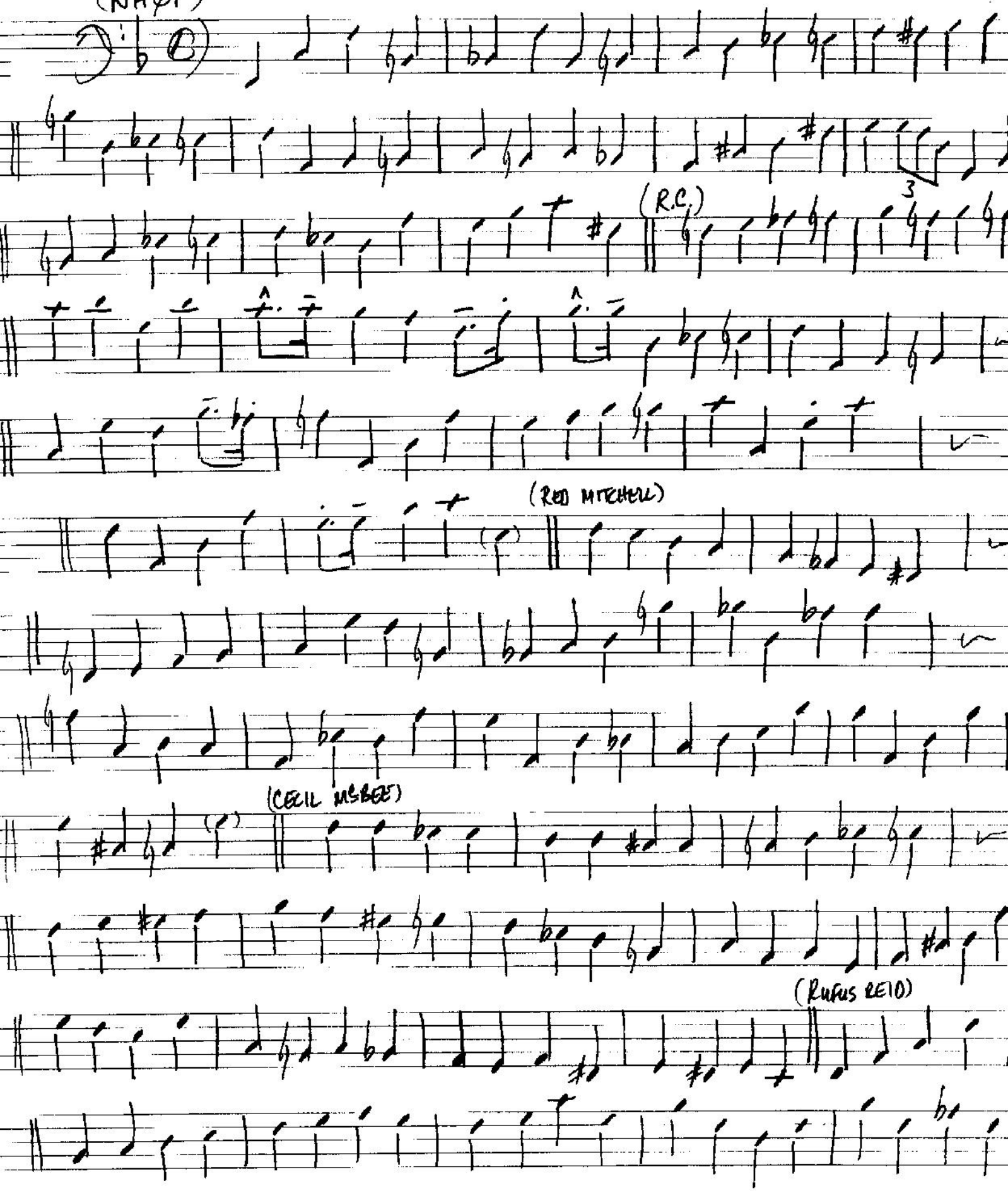
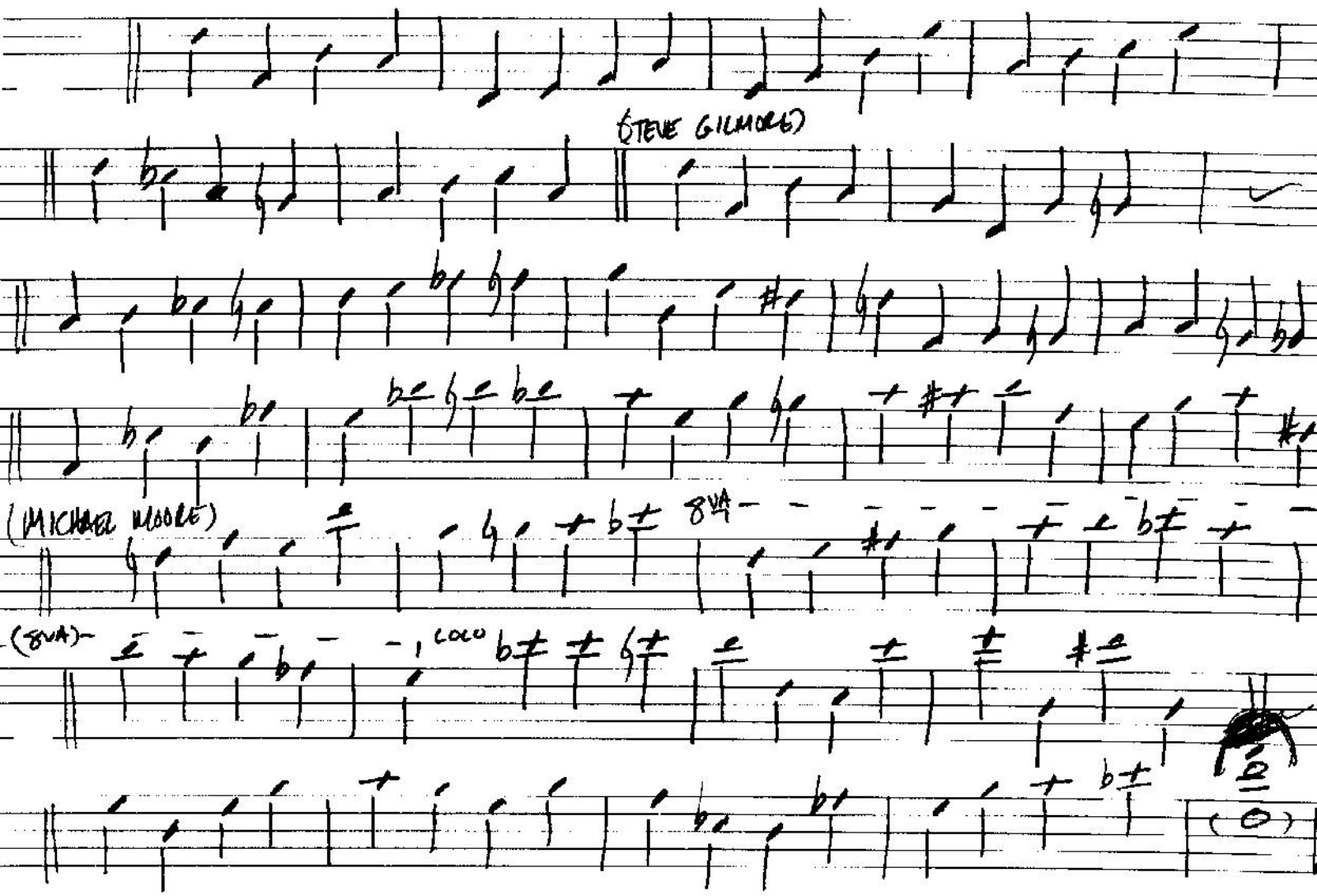
F BLUES BASS LINES - pg. 1

(NHØP)

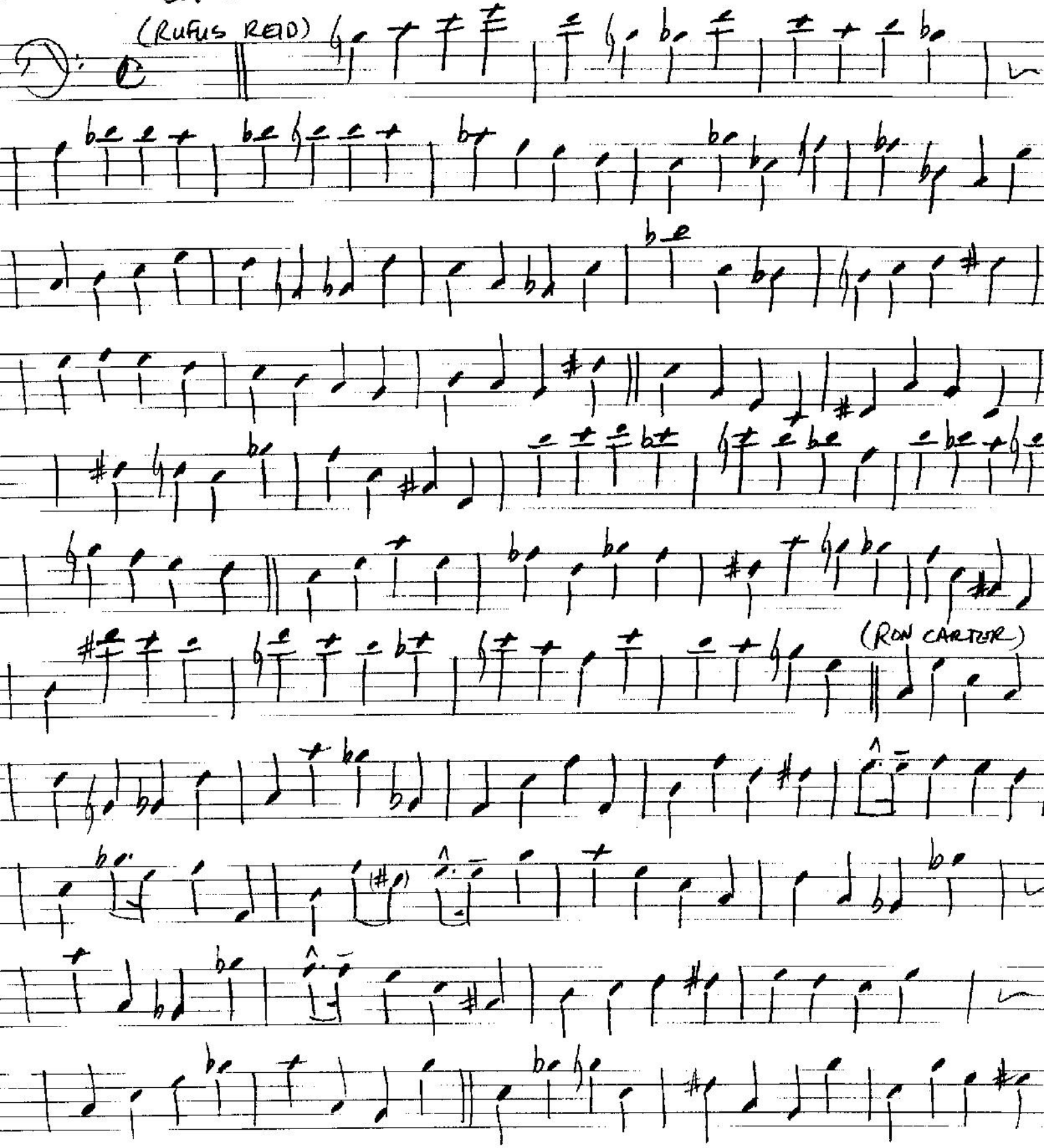


F BLUES BASS LINES - pg. 2

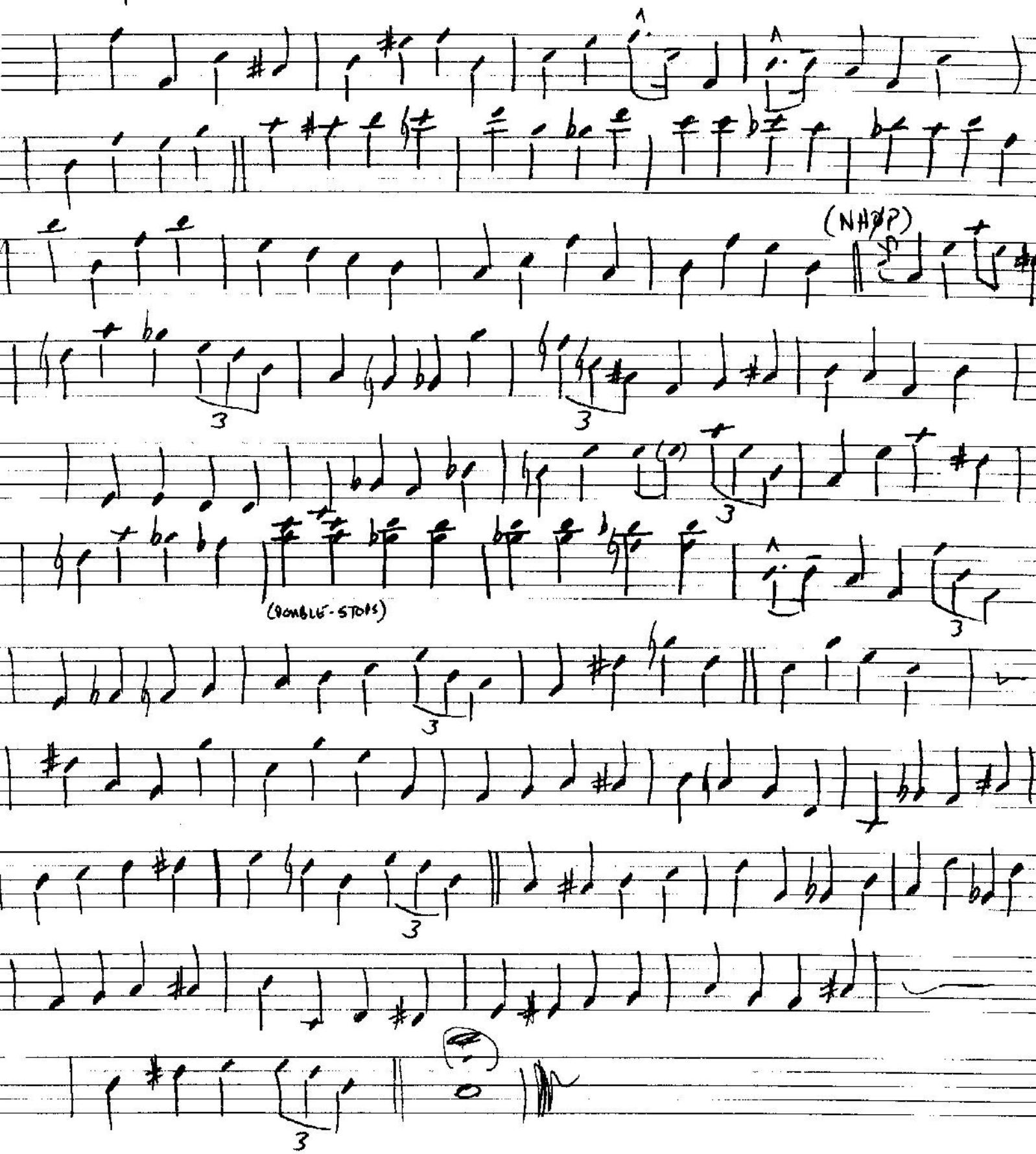


"YARDBIRD SUITE"
BASS LINES

(RUFUS REID)

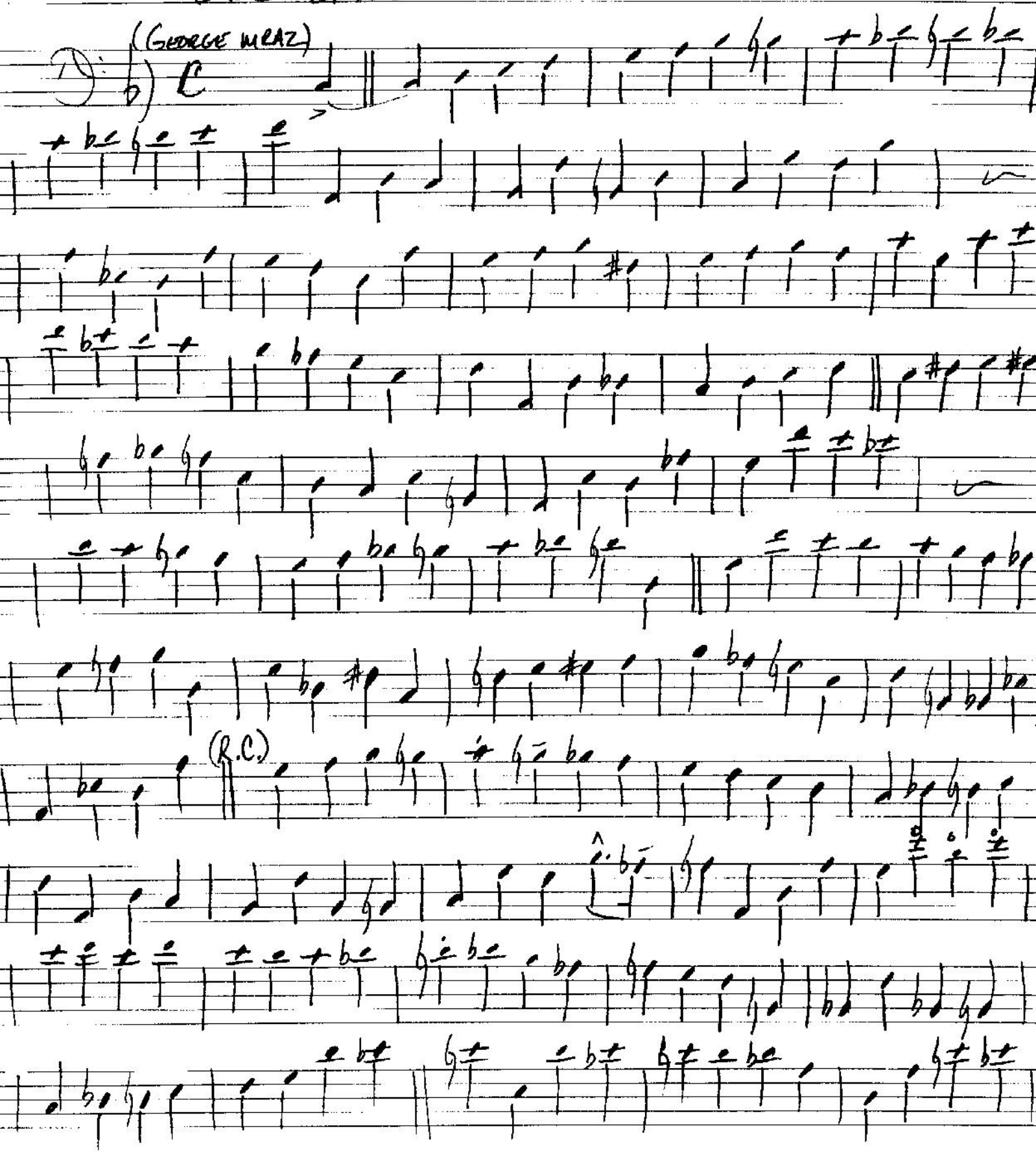
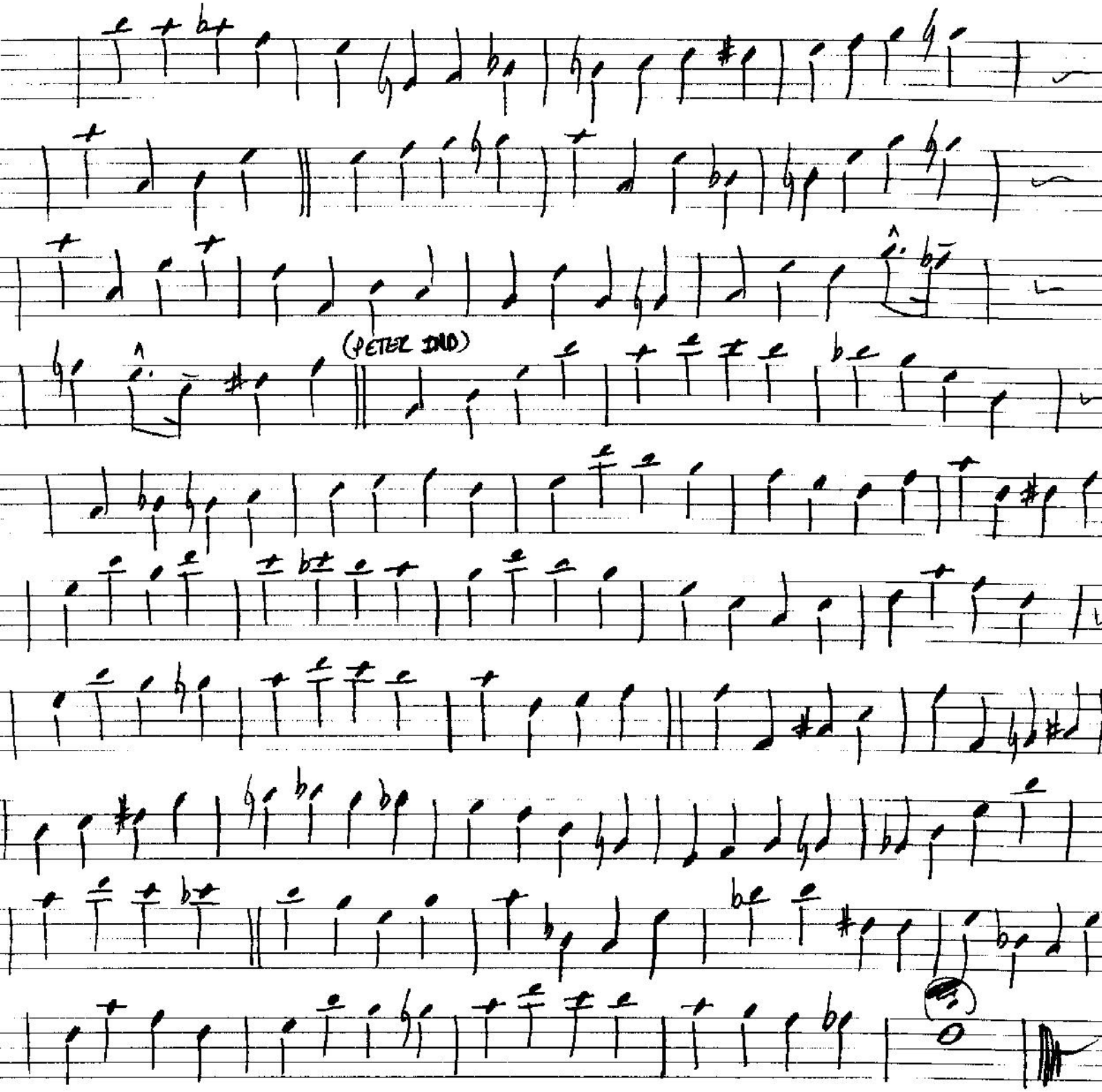


"YARDBIRD" BASS LINES - pg. 2



"SCRAPPLE FROM THE APPLE"

BASS LINES



"SCRAPPLE" BASS LINES - pg. 2